



108

Greatest Of All Times

*globally selected
personalities*

ISBN:978-81-982954-5-3

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18 Sep 1709 <:::><:::><:::> 13 Dec 1784



“ Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures.”

Samuel Johnson

(The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia)



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[Earliest Lexicographer]

Baillie Gifford Prize

[Samuel Johnson Prize]

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baillie_Gifford_Prize

Baillie Gifford Prize



Awarded for Non-fiction writing

Date 1999; 26 years ago

Country United Kingdom

Formerly called Samuel Johnson Prize

Reward(s) £50,000

Currently held by [Fire Weather: A True Story from a Hotter World](#) by [John Vaillant](#)

Website thebailliegiffordprize.co.uk

The Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-Fiction, formerly the Samuel Johnson Prize, is an annual British book prize for the best non-fiction writing in the English language. It was founded in 1999 following the demise of the [NCR Book Award](#). With its motto "All the best stories are true", the prize covers current affairs, history, politics,

science, sport, travel, biography, autobiography and the arts. The competition is open to authors of any nationality whose work is published in the UK in English. The longlist, shortlist and winner is chosen by a panel of independent judges, which changes every year. Formerly named after English author and lexicographer [Samuel Johnson](#), the award was renamed in 2015 after [Baillie Gifford](#), an investment management firm and the primary sponsor. Since 2016, the annual dinner and awards ceremony has been sponsored by the [Blavatnik Family Foundation](#).

The prize is governed by the Board of Directors of The Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-fiction Limited, a not-for-profit company. Since 2018, the Chair of the Board has been [Sir Peter Bazalgette](#), who succeeded Stuart Proffitt, the chair since 1999. In 2015, Toby Mundy was appointed as the Prize's first director.

Winners and shortlists

1990s

Year	Author	Title	Result
1999	Antony Beevor	<i>Stalingrad</i>	Won
	Ian Kershaw	<i>Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris</i> (about Adolf Hitler)	Shortlisted
	Ann Wroe	<i>Pilate: The Biography of an Invented Man</i> (about Pontius Pilate)	Shortlisted
	John Diamond	<i>C: Because Cowards Get Cancer Too</i>	Shortlisted
	Richard Holmes	<i>Coleridge: Darker Reflections</i> (about Samuel Taylor Coleridge)	Shortlisted
	David Landes	<i>The Wealth and Poverty of Nations</i>	Shortlisted

2000s

Year	Author	Title	Result
2000	David Cairns	<i>Berlioz: Volume 2</i>	Won
	Tony Hawks	<i>Playing the Moldovans at Tennis</i>	Shortlisted
	Brenda Maddox	<i>Yeats's Ghosts: The Secret Life of W. B. Yeats</i> (about W. B. Yeats)	Shortlisted
	Matt Ridley	<i>Genome: The Autobiography of a Species in 23 Chapters</i>	Shortlisted

	William Shawcross	<i>Deliver us from Evil: Warlords, Peacekeepers and a World of Endless Conflict</i>	Shortlisted
	Francis Wheen	<i>Karl Marx</i> (about Karl Marx)	Shortlisted
2001	Michael Burleigh	<i>The Third Reich: A New History</i>	Won
	Richard Fortey	<i>Trilobite!: Eyewitness to Evolution</i>	Shortlisted
	Catherine Merridale	<i>Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Russia</i>	Shortlisted
	Graham Robb	<i>Rimbaud</i> (about Arthur Rimbaud)	Shortlisted
	Simon Sebag Montefiore	<i>Prince of Princes: The Life of Potemkin</i> (about Grigory Potemkin)	Shortlisted
	Robert Skidelsky	<i>John Maynard Keynes: Fighting for Britain, 1937–1946</i> (about John Maynard Keynes)	Shortlisted
2002	Margaret MacMillan	<i>Peacemakers: The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War</i>	Won
	Eamon Duffy	<i>The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village</i>	Shortlisted
	William Fiennes	<i>The Snow Geese</i>	Shortlisted
	Richard Hamblyn	<i>The Invention of Clouds: How an Amateur Meteorologist Forged the Language of the Skies</i>	Shortlisted
	Roy Jenkins	<i>Churchill: a Biography</i> (about Winston Churchill)	Shortlisted
	Brendan Simms	<i>Unfinest Hour: Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia</i>	Shortlisted
2003	T. J. Binyon	<i>Pushkin: A Biography</i> (about Alexander Pushkin)	Won
	Orlando Figes	<i>Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia</i>	Shortlisted
	Aminatta Forna	<i>The Devil that Danced on the Water: A Daughter's Memoir of her Father, her Family, her Country and a Continent</i>	Shortlisted

	Olivia Judson	<i>Dr Tatiana's Sex Advice to All Creation: The Definitive Guide to the Evolutionary Biology of Sex</i>	Shortlisted
	Claire Tomalin	<i>Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Self</i>	Shortlisted
	Edgar Vincent	<i>Nelson: Love and Fame</i> (about Lord Nelson)	Shortlisted
2004	Anna Funder	<i>Stasiland: Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall</i>	Won
	Anne Applebaum	<i>Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps</i>	Shortlisted
	Jonathan Bate	<i>John Clare: A Biography</i> (about John Clare)	Shortlisted
	Bill Bryson	<i>A Short History of Nearly Everything</i>	Shortlisted
	Aidan Hartley	<i>The Zanzibar Chest: A Memoir of Love and War</i>	Shortlisted
	Tom Holland	<i>Rubicon: The Last Years of the Roman Republic</i>	Shortlisted
2005	Jonathan Coe	<i>Like a Fiery Elephant: The Story of B. S. Johnson</i> (about B. S. Johnson)	Won
	Alexander Masters	<i>Stuart: A Life Backwards</i>	Shortlisted
	Suketu Mehta	<i>Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found</i>	Shortlisted
	Orhan Pamuk	<i>Istanbul: Memories and the City</i>	Shortlisted
	Hilary Spurling	<i>Matisse the Master: The Conquest of Colour 1909–1954</i> (about Henri Matisse)	Shortlisted
	Sarah Wise	<i>The Italian Boy: Murder and Grave-Robbery in 1830s London</i>	Shortlisted
2006	James S. Shapiro	<i>1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare</i>	Won
	Alan Bennett	<i>Untold Stories</i>	Shortlisted
	Jerry Brotton	<i>The Sale of the Late King's Goods: Charles I and His Art Collection</i>	Shortlisted

	<u>Carmen Callil</u>	<i>Bad Faith: A Forgotten History of Family & Fatherland</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Tony Judt</u>	<i>Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Tom Reiss</u>	<i>The Orientalist: In Search of a Man Caught Between East and West</i>	Shortlisted
2007	<u>Rajiv Chandrasekaran</u>	<i>Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone</i>	Won
	<u>Ian Buruma</u>	<i>Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo Van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Peter Hennessy</u>	<i>Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Georgina Howell</u>	<i>Daughter of the Desert: The Extraordinary Life of Gertrude Bell</i> (about <u>Gertrude Bell</u>)	Shortlisted
	<u>Dominic Streatfeild</u>	<i>Brainwash: The Secret History of Mind Control</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Adrian Tinniswood</u>	<i>The Verneys: A True Story of Love, War, and Madness in Seventeenth-Century England</i>	Shortlisted
2008	<u>Kate Summerscale</u>	<i>The Suspicions of Mr Whicher or the Murder at Road Hill House</i>	Won
	<u>Tim Butcher</u>	<i>Blood River: A Journey to Africa's Broken Heart</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Mark Cocker</u>	<i>Crow Country</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Orlando Figes</u>	<i>The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Patrick French</u>	<i>The World Is What It Is: The Authorised Biography of VS Naipaul</i> (about <u>V. S. Naipaul</u>)	Shortlisted
	<u>Alex Ross</u>	<i>The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century</i>	Shortlisted
2009	<u>Philip Hoare</u>	<i>Leviathan or, The Whale</i>	Won
	<u>Liaquat Ahamed</u>	<i>Lords of Finance: The Bankers Who Broke the World</i>	Shortlisted

Ben Goldacre	<i>Bad Science</i>	Shortlisted
David Grann	<i>The Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon</i>	Shortlisted
Richard Holmes	<i>The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science</i>	Shortlisted
Manjit Kumar	<i>Quantum: Einstein, Bohr and the Great Debate about the Nature of Reality</i>	Shortlisted

2010s

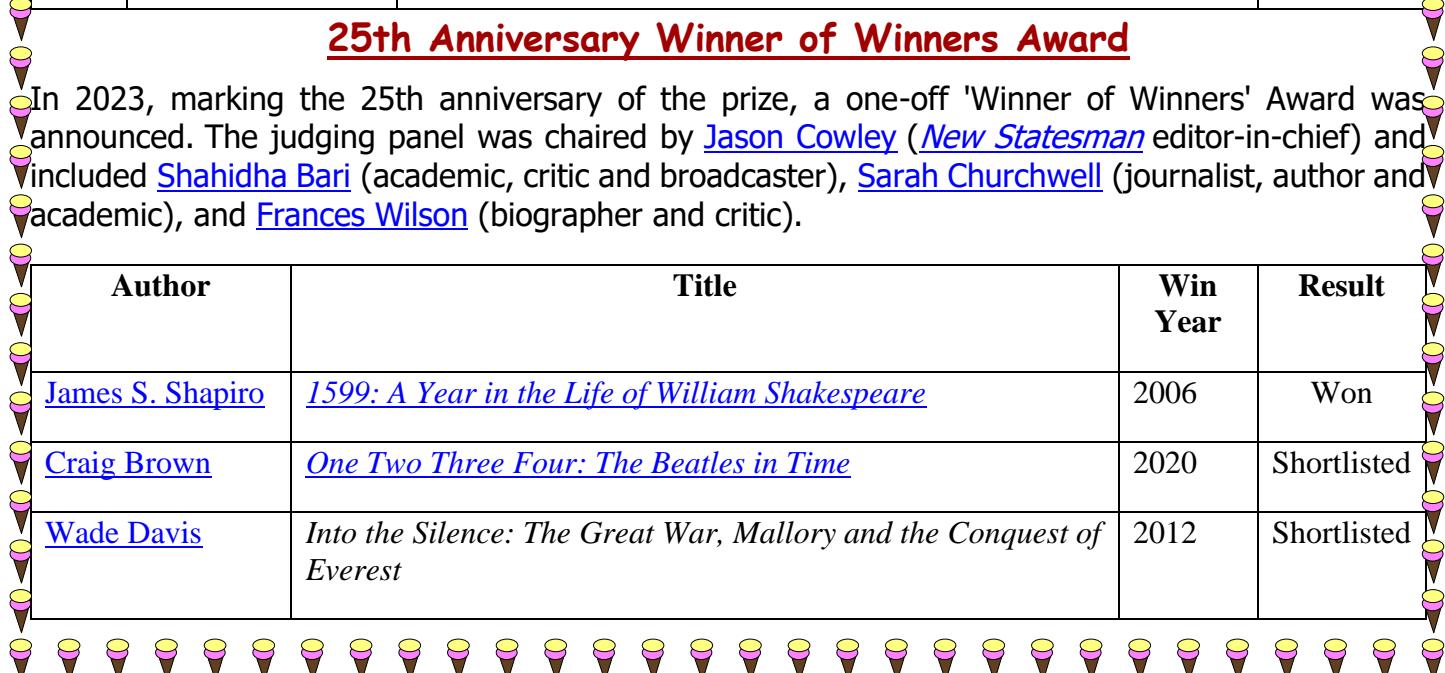
Year	Author	Title	Result
2010	Barbara Demick	<i>Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea</i>	Won
	Alex Bellos	<i>Alex's Adventures in Numberland: Dispatches from the Wonderful World of Mathematics</i>	Shortlisted
	Luke Jennings	<i>Blood Knots: On Fathers, Friendship and Fishing</i>	Shortlisted
	Andrew Ross Sorkin	<i>Too Big to Fail: The Inside Story of How Wall Street and Washington Fought to Save the Financial System—and Themselves</i>	Shortlisted
	Jenny Uglow	<i>A Gambling Man: Charles II and the Restoration</i>	Shortlisted
	Richard Wrangham	<i>Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human</i>	Shortlisted
2011	Frank Dikötter	<i>Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958–1962</i>	Won
	Andrew Graham-Dixon	<i>Caravaggio: A Life Sacred and Profane</i> (biography of Caravaggio)	Shortlisted
	Maya Jasanoff	<i>Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World</i>	Shortlisted
	Matt Ridley	<i>The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves</i>	Shortlisted
	Jonathan Steinberg	<i>Bismarck: A Life</i> (biography of Otto von Bismarck)	Shortlisted

	John Stubbs	<i>Reprobates: The Cavaliers of the English Civil War</i>	Shortlisted
2012	Wade Davis	<i>Into the Silence: The Great War, Mallory and the Conquest of Everest</i>	Won
	Katherine Boo	<i>Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Slum</i>	Shortlisted
	Robert Macfarlane	<i>The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot</i>	Shortlisted
	Steven Pinker	<i>The Better Angels of our Nature: A History of Violence and Humanity</i>	Shortlisted
	Paul Preston	<i>The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain</i>	Shortlisted
	Sue Prideaux	<i>Strindberg: A Life</i> (about August Strindberg)	Shortlisted
2013	Lucy Hughes-Hallett	<i>The Pike: Gabriele D'Annunzio, Poet, Seducer and Preacher of War</i>	Won
	David Crane	<i>Empires of the Dead: How One Man's Vision led to the Creation of WWI's World Graves</i>	Shortlisted
	William Dalrymple	<i>Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan</i>	Shortlisted
	Dave Goulson	<i>A Sting in the Tale: My Adventures with Bumblebees</i>	Shortlisted
	Charlotte Higgins	<i>Under Another Sky: Journeys in Roman Britain</i>	Shortlisted
	Charles Moore	<i>Margaret Thatcher: The Authorised Biography</i>	Shortlisted
2014	Helen Macdonald	<i>H Is for Hawk</i>	Won
	John Campbell	<i>Roy Jenkins: A Biography</i> (about Roy Jenkins)	Shortlisted
	Marion Coutts	<i>The Iceberg: A Memoir</i>	Shortlisted

	<u>Greg Grandin</u>	<i>The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Alison Light</u>	<i>Common People: The History of an English Family</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Caroline Moorehead</u>	<i>Village of Secrets: Defying the Nazis in Vichy France</i>	Shortlisted
2015	<u>Steve Silberman</u>	<i>NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and How to Think Smarter About People Who Think Differently</i>	Won
	<u>Jonathan Bate</u>	<i>Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life</i> (about <u>Ted Hughes</u>)	Shortlisted
	<u>Robert Macfarlane</u>	<i>Landmarks</i>	Shortlisted
	Laurence Scott	<i>The Four-Dimensional Human: Ways of Being in the Digital World</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Emma Sky</u>	<i>The Unravelling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Samanth Subramanian</u>	<i>This Divided Island: Stories from the Sri Lankan Civil War</i>	Shortlisted
2016	<u>Philippe Sands</u>	<i>East West Street: On the Origins of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity</i>	Won
	<u>Svetlana Alexievich</u>	<i>Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Margo Jefferson</u>	<i>Negroland: A Memoir</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Hisham Matar</u>	<i>The Return: Fathers, Sons and the Land in Between</i>	Shortlisted
2017	<u>David France</u>	<i>How to Survive a Plague: The Inside Story of How Citizens and Science Tamed AIDS</i>	Won
	<u>Christopher de Bellaigue</u>	<i>The Islamic Enlightenment The Modern Struggle Between Faith and Reason</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Kapka Kassabova</u>	<i>Border: A Journey to the Edge of Europe</i>	Shortlisted

	<u>Daniel Mendelsohn</u>	<i>An Odyssey: A Father, a Son and an Epic</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Mark O'Connell</u>	<i>To Be a Machine: Adventures Among Cyborgs, Utopians, Hackers, and the Futurists Solving the Modest Problem of Death</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Simon Schama</u>	<i>Belonging: The Story of the Jews, 1492–1900</i>	Shortlisted
2018	<u>Serhii Plokhy</u>	<i>Chernobyl: History of a Tragedy</i>	Won
	<u>Hannah Fry</u>	<i>Hello World: How to Be Human in the Age of the Machine</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Ben Macintyre</u>	<i>The Spy and the Traitor: The Greatest Espionage Story of the Cold War</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Thomas Page McBee</u>	<i>Amateur: A True Story About What Makes a Man</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Stephen R. Platt</u>	<i>Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of China's Last Golden Age</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Carl Zimmer</u>	<i>She Has Her Mother's Laugh: The Powers, Perversions and Potential of Heredity</i>	Shortlisted
2019	<u>Hallie Rubenhold</u>	<i>The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper</i>	Won
	<u>Casey Cep</u>	<i>Furious Hours: Murder, Fraud and the Last Trial of Harper Lee</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Laura Cumming</u>	<i>On Chapel Sands: My Mother and Other Missing Persons</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>William Feaver</u>	<i>The Lives of Lucian Freud: Youth (about <u>Lucian Freud</u>)</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Julia Lovell</u>	<i>Maoism: A Global History</i>	Shortlisted
	<u>Azadeh Moaveni</u>	<i>Guest House for Young Widows: Among the Women of ISIS</i>	Shortlisted
2020s			
Year	Author	Title	Result
2020	<u>Craig Brown</u>	<i>One Two Three Four: The Beatles in Time</i>	Won

	Matthew Cobb	<i>The Idea of the Brain: A History</i>	Shortlisted
	Sudhir Hazareesingh	<i>Black Spartacus: The Epic Life of Toussaint Louverture</i>	Shortlisted
	Christina Lamb	<i>Our Bodies, Their Battlefield: What War Does to Women</i>	Shortlisted
	Amy Stanley	<i>Stranger in the Shogun's City: A Japanese Woman and Her World</i>	Shortlisted
	Kate Summerscale	<i>The Haunting of Alma Fielding: A True Ghost Story</i>	Shortlisted
2021	Patrick Radden Keefe	<i>Empire of Pain: The Secret History of the Sackler Dynasty</i>	Won
	Cal Flyn	<i>Islands of Abandonment: Life in the Post-Human Landscape</i>	Shortlisted
	Harald Jähner	<i>Aftermath: Life in the Fallout of the Third Reich, 1945–1955</i>	Shortlisted
	Kei Miller	<i>Things I Have Withheld</i>	Shortlisted
	John Preston	<i>Fall: The Mystery of Robert Maxwell</i> (about Robert Maxwell)	Shortlisted
	Lea Ypi	<i>Free: Coming of Age at the End of History</i>	Shortlisted
2022	Katherine Rundell	<i>Super-Infinite: The Transformations of John Donne</i> (about John Donne)	Won
	Caroline Elkins	<i>Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire</i>	Shortlisted
	Jonathan Freedland	<i>The Escape Artist: The Man Who Broke Out of Auschwitz to Warn the World</i>	Shortlisted
	Sally Hayden	<i>My Fourth Time, We Drowned: Seeking Refuge on the World's Deadliest Migration Route</i>	Shortlisted
	Anna Keay	<i>The Restless Republic: Britain Without a Crown</i>	Shortlisted
	Polly Morland	<i>A Fortunate Woman: A Country Doctor's Story</i>	Shortlisted

	2023	John Vaillant	<i>Fire Weather: A True Story from a Hotter World</i>	Won
		Hannah Barnes	<i>Time to Think: The Inside Story of the Collapse of the Tavistock's Gender Service for Children</i>	Shortlisted
		Tania Branigan	<i>Red Memory: Living, Remembering and Forgetting China's Cultural Revolution,</i>	Shortlisted
		Christopher Clark	<i>Revolutionary Spring: Fighting for a New World 1848–1849</i>	Shortlisted
		Jeremy Eichler	<i>Time's Echo: The Second World War, The Holocaust, and The Music of Remembrance</i>	Shortlisted
		Jennifer Homans	<i>Mr. B: George Balanchine's Twentieth Century</i>	Shortlisted
	2024	Richard Flanagan	<i>Question 7</i>	Won
		Rachel Clarke	<i>The Story of a Heart</i>	Shortlisted
		Annie Jacobsen	<i>Nuclear War: A Scenario</i>	Shortlisted
		Viet Thanh Nguyen	<i>A Man of Two Faces: A Memoir, a History, a Memorial</i>	Shortlisted
		Sue Prideaux	<i>Wild Thing: A Life of Paul Gauguin</i>	Shortlisted
		David Van Reybrouck	<i>Revolusi: Indonesia and the Birth of the Modern World</i>	Shortlisted

25th Anniversary Winner of Winners Award

In 2023, marking the 25th anniversary of the prize, a one-off 'Winner of Winners' Award was announced. The judging panel was chaired by [Jason Cowley](#) ([New Statesman](#) editor-in-chief) and included [Shahidha Bari](#) (academic, critic and broadcaster), [Sarah Churchwell](#) (journalist, author and academic), and [Frances Wilson](#) (biographer and critic).

Author	Title	Win Year	Result
James S. Shapiro	<i>1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare</i>	2006	Won
Craig Brown	<i>One Two Three Four: The Beatles in Time</i>	2020	Shortlisted
Wade Davis	<i>Into the Silence: The Great War, Mallory and the Conquest of Everest</i>	2012	Shortlisted

<u>Barbara Demick</u>	<u><i>Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea</i></u>	2010	Shortlisted
<u>Patrick Radden Keefe</u>	<u><i>Empire of Pain: The Secret History of the Sackler Dynasty</i></u>	2021	Shortlisted
<u>Margaret MacMillan</u>	<u><i>Peacemakers: The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War</i></u>		

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LEGACY

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Johnson

Johnson was, in the words of Steven Lynn, "more than a well-known writer and scholar"; he was a celebrity, for the activities and the state of his health in his later years were constantly reported in various journals and newspapers, and when there was nothing to report, something was invented. According to Bate, "Johnson loved biography," and he "changed the whole course of biography for the modern world. One by-product was the most famous single work of biographical art in the whole of literature, Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, and there were many other memoirs and biographies of a similar kind written on Johnson after his death." These accounts of his life include Thomas Tyers's A Biographical Sketch of Dr Samuel Johnson (1784); Boswell's The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides (1785); Hester Thrale's Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson, which drew on entries from her diary and other notes; John Hawkins's Life of Samuel Johnson, the first full-length biography of Johnson; and, in 1792, Arthur Murphy's An Essay on the Life and Genius of Samuel Johnson, which replaced Hawkins's biography as the introduction to a collection of Johnson's Works. Another important source was Fanny Burney, who described Johnson as "the acknowledged Head of Literature in this kingdom" and kept a diary containing details missing from other biographies. Above all, Boswell's portrayal of Johnson is the work best known to general readers. Although critics like Donald Greene argue about its status as a true biography, the work became successful as Boswell and his friends promoted it at the expense of the many other works on Johnson's life.

In criticism, Johnson had a lasting influence, although not everyone viewed him favourably. Some, like Macaulay, regarded Johnson as an idiot savant who produced some respectable works, and others, like the Romantic poets, were completely opposed to Johnson's views on poetry and literature, especially with regard to Milton. However, some of their contemporaries disagreed: Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare* is based in part on Johnson's views of Shakespeare, and Johnson influenced Jane Austen's writing style and philosophy. Later, Johnson's works came into favour, and Matthew Arnold, in his *Six Chief Lives* from Johnson's "Lives of the Poets", considered the *Lives of Milton, Dryden, Pope, Addison, Swift, and Gray* as

"points which stand as so many natural centres, and by returning to which we can always find our way again".



Statue of Dr Johnson erected in 1838 opposite the house where he was born at Lichfield's Market Square.

There are also statues of him in London and Uttoxeter.

More than a century after his death, literary critics such as [G. Birkbeck Hill](#) and [T. S. Eliot](#) came to regard Johnson as a serious critic. They began to study Johnson's works with an increasing focus on the critical analysis found in his edition of Shakespeare and *Lives of the Poets*. [Yvor Winters](#) claimed that "A great critic is the rarest of all literary geniuses; perhaps the only critic in English who deserves that epithet is Samuel Johnson". [F. R. Leavis](#) agreed and, on Johnson's criticism, said, "When we read him we know, beyond question, that we have here a powerful and distinguished mind operating at first hand upon literature. This, we can say with emphatic conviction, really *is criticism*". [Edmund Wilson](#) claimed that "The *Lives of the Poets* and the prefaces and commentary on Shakespeare are among the most brilliant and the most acute documents in the whole range of English criticism".

The critic [Harold Bloom](#) placed Johnson's work firmly within the [Western canon](#), describing him as "unmatched by any critic in any nation before or after him ... Bate in the finest insight on Johnson I know, emphasised that no other writer is so obsessed by the realisation that the mind is an activity, one that will turn to destructiveness of the self or of others unless it is directed to labour." Johnson's philosophical insistence that the language within literature must be examined became a prevailing mode of [literary theory](#) during the mid-20th century.

Half of Johnson's surviving correspondence, together with some of his manuscripts, editions of his books, paintings and other items associated with him are in the Donald and [Mary Hyde](#) Collection of Dr. Samuel Johnson, housed at [Houghton Library](#) at [Harvard University](#) since 2003. The collection includes drafts of his *Plan for a Dictionary*, documents associated with Hester Thrale Piozzi and James Boswell (including corrected proofs of his *Life of Johnson*) and a teapot owned by Johnson.

There are many societies formed around and dedicated to the study and enjoyment of Samuel Johnson's life and works. On the bicentennial of Johnson's death in 1984, Oxford University held a week-long conference featuring 50 papers, and the [Arts Council of Great Britain](#) held an exhibit of "Johnsonian portraits and other memorabilia". The London [Times](#) and [Punch](#) produced parodies of Johnson's style

for the occasion. In 1999, the [BBC Four](#) television channel started the [Samuel Johnson Prize](#), an award for non-fiction. A [Royal Society of Arts blue plaque](#), unveiled in 1876, marks Johnson's Gough Square house. In 2009, Johnson was among the ten people selected by the [Royal Mail](#) for their "[Eminent Britons](#)" [commemorative postage stamp](#) issue. On 18 September 2017 Google commemorated Johnson's 308th birthday with a [Google Doodle](#). The date of his death, 13 December, is [commemorated](#) in the [Church of England's Calendar of Saints](#).^[250] There is a memorial to him at [St Paul's Cathedral](#) in London.

Major publications



Bust of Johnson by Joseph Nollekens, 1777

Essays

- [Birmingham Journal](#) (1732-33)
- [Plan for a Dictionary of the English Language](#) (1747)
- [The Rambler](#) (1750-52)
- [The Adventurer](#) (1753-54)
- [Universal Visiter](#) (1756)
- [The Literary Magazine, or Universal Review](#) (1756)
- [The Idler](#) (1758-60)
- [The False Alarm](#) (1770)
- [Thoughts on the Late Transactions Respecting Falkland's Islands](#) (1771)
- [The Patriot](#) (1774)
- [A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland](#) (1775)
- [Taxation no Tyranny](#) (1775)
- [The Beauties of Johnson](#) (1781)

Poetry

- [Messiah](#) (1728), a translation into Latin of [Alexander Pope's Messiah](#)
- [London](#) (1738)
- [Prologue at the Opening of the Theatre in Drury Lane](#) (1747)
- [The Vanity of Human Wishes](#) (1749)
- [Irene, a Tragedy](#) (1749)

Biographies

- *A Voyage to Abyssinia* (1735), by Jerome Lobo, translated from the French
- *Life of Mr Richard Savage* (1744)
- *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth* (1745)
- "Life of Browne" (1756) in Thomas Browne's *Christian Morals*
- *Proposals for Printing, by Subscription, the Dramatick Works of William Shakespeare* (1756)
- *Preface to the Plays of William Shakespeare* (1765)
- *The Plays of William Shakespeare* (1765)
- *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81)

Dictionaries

- *Preface to a Dictionary of the English Language* (1755)
- *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755)

Novella

- *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (1759)

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Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/johnson_samuel.shtml

Johnson was an English writer and critic, and one of the most famous literary figures of the 18th century. His best-known work is his 'Dictionary of the English Language'.

Samuel Johnson was born in Lichfield, Staffordshire, on 18 September 1709. His father was a bookseller. He was educated at Lichfield Grammar School and spent a brief period at Oxford University, but was forced to leave due to lack of money. Unable to find teaching work, he drifted into a writing career. In 1735, he married Elizabeth Porter, a widow more than 20 years his senior.

In 1737, Johnson moved to London where he struggled to support himself through journalism, writing on a huge variety of subjects. He gradually acquired a literary reputation and in 1747 a syndicate of printers commissioned him to compile his 'Dictionary of the English Language'. The task took eight years, and Johnson employed six assistants, all of them working in his house off Fleet Street.

The dictionary was published on 15 April 1755. It was not the first such dictionary, but was certainly the most important at that time. In Johnson's lifetime five further editions were published, and a sixth came out when he died.

Johnson's wife had died in 1752 and shortly afterwards Francis Barber, a former slave from Jamaica, joined Johnson's household as a servant. He lived with Johnson for more than 30 years, as did his wife and children, and became Johnson's heir.

Johnson was continually short of money, despite the success of his dictionary. In 1762, his financial situation was alleviated when he was awarded a government pension.

In 1763, he met James Boswell, a young Scottish lawyer, whose 'Life of Johnson' (published in 1791) did much to spread Johnson's name. In 1773, Johnson and Boswell set out on a three-month tour of the Scottish Highlands and the Hebrides. Both wrote accounts of their travels. Johnson spent considerable time in Edinburgh in the 1770s.

Johnson was by now the leader of the London literary world, and a friend of notable artists and writers such as Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, Oliver Goldsmith and David Garrick. Another important friendship for Johnson was with Henry Thrale, a wealthy brewer and member of parliament, and his wife Hester. Johnson became part of their family, treating their London houses as second homes.

Johnson died on 13 December 1784 and is buried at Westminster Abbey.

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Dr Johnson's House

Welcome to Dr Johnson's House

'...when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life'

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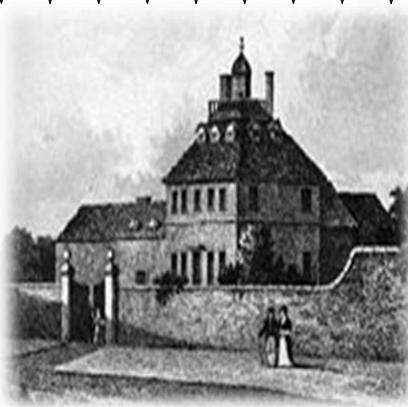
Birthplace of Samuel Johnson, Lichfield, Staffordshire, England



Entrance of Pembroke College, Oxford.



Elizabeth "Tetty" Porter,
Johnson's wife



Edial Hall School

L O N D O N

A

P O E M,

BY ENTHUSIASM OF THE

THIRD SATIRE of JUVENAL.

----- Regis impie
Tunc patiens Urbis, tem ferens ut super se?
Juv.

The SECOND EDITION.

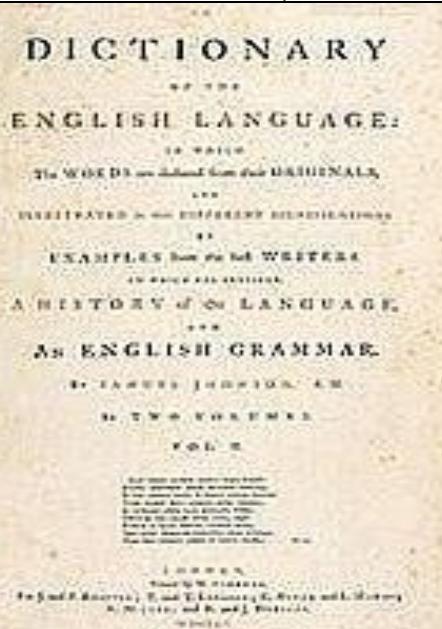
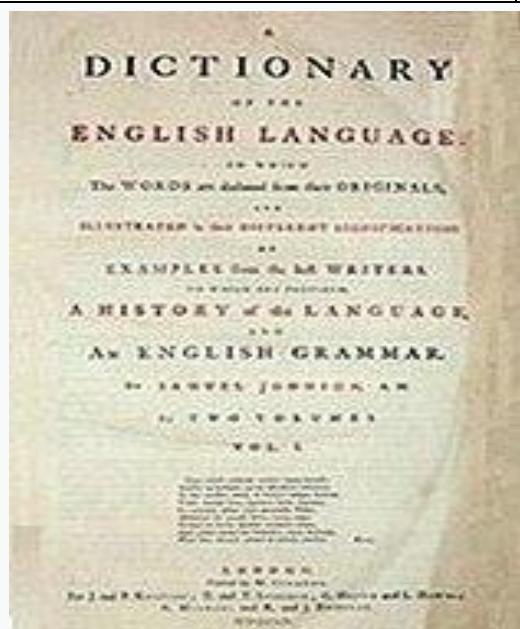
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L O N D O N.
Printed for R. Dodley, at Tally's Head in Pall-Mall.
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Title page of London second edition



Johnson (1775) showing his intense concentration and the weakness of his eyes; he did not want to be depicted as "Blinking Sam". This unique portrait showing his nearsightedness is in the Huntington Library



Johnson's Dictionary Vol. 1 & Vol. 2 (1755) title page

Samuel Johnson



Portrait by [Joshua Reynolds](#), c. 1772

Born	18 September 1709 (OS 7 September) Lichfield , England
Died	13 December 1784 (aged 75) London, England
Resting place	Westminster Abbey
Education	Pembroke College, Oxford
Political party	Tory
Spouse	Elizabeth Porter (<i>née</i> Jervis)

(m. 1735; died 1752)

Writing career

Pen name	Dr Johnson
Language	English, Latin
Notable works	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Dictionary of the English Language (1755)• A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland (1775)

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sam. Johnson".

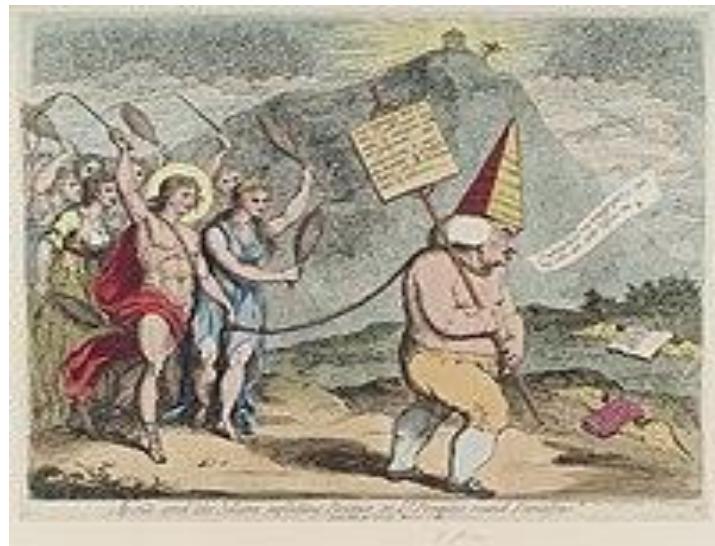
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Johnson



Dr. Johnson in the ante-room of Lord Chesterfield.
Coloured engraving by E.M. Ward.



A literary party, 1781, of Johnson (second from left)
and other members of "The Club"



A caricature of Johnson by James Gillray mocking him for his literary criticism;
he is shown doing penance for Apollo and the Muses with
Mount Parnassus in the background.



The

SAMUEL JOHNSON

Birthplace, Museum & Birthplace

<https://www.samueljohnsonbirthplace.org.uk/default.aspx>

Welcome

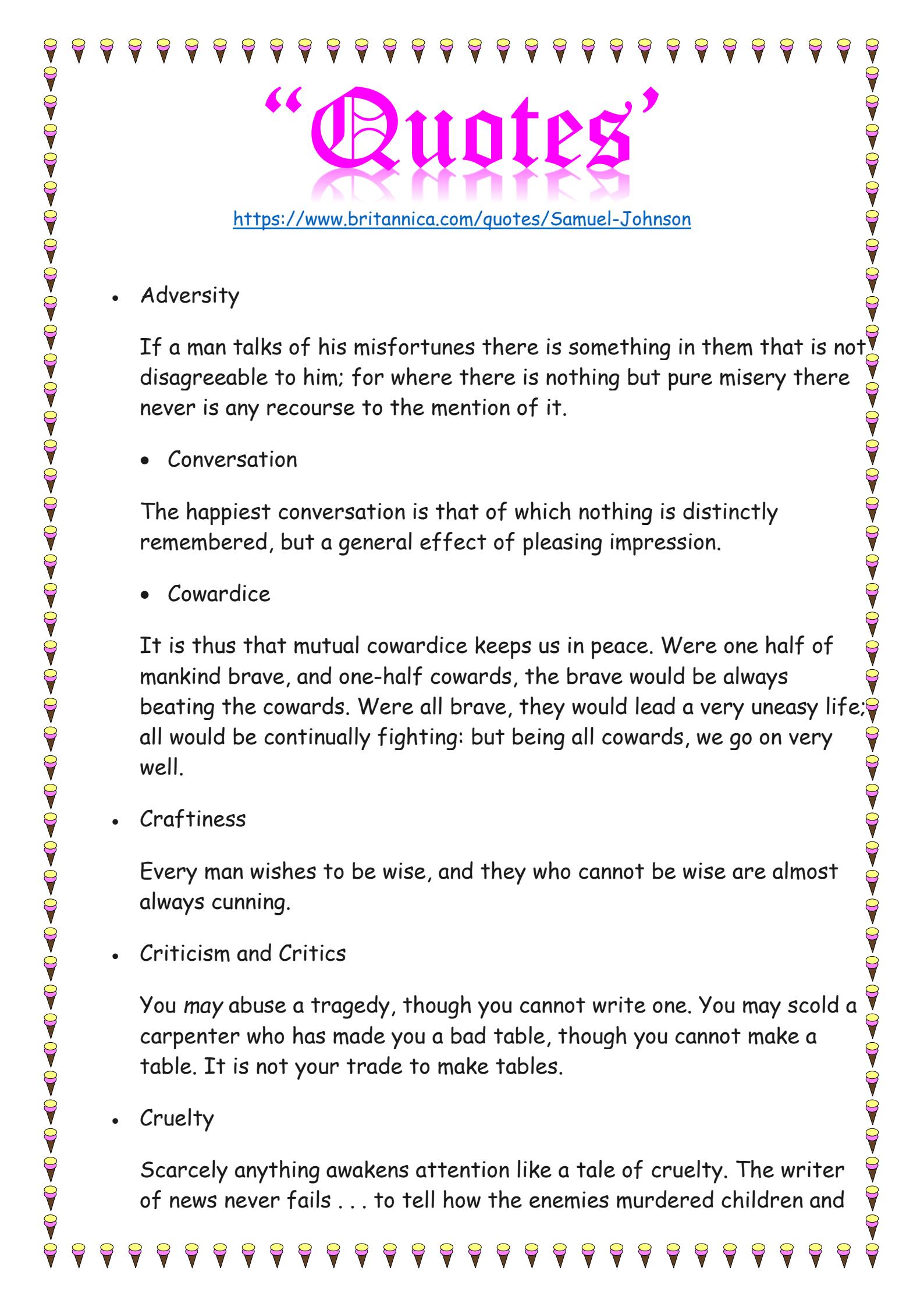
Visit the family home that inspired a literary giant. Best known for his *Dictionary of the English Language*, Samuel Johnson spent the first 27 years of his life in this atmospheric Grade I listed trader's townhouse. Now a Museum to his life and times, with stunning collections and events for all throughout the year. We look forward to welcoming you to Johnson's home.

The Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum opened to the public in 1901 and holds a collection of over 8,000 items relating to Johnson, his circle and 18th century Lichfield.

The collection includes prints and paintings, furniture, manuscripts and books: including many early and rare editions of Johnson's work. Many significant books were obtained through two major donations, now housed in the libraries named after their donors: the Hay Hunter and Blum Libraries. The Wood library, named after the first chairman of the Birthplace Committee, holds over 2000 volumes and serves as the Museum's study space. Personal items include Johnson's armchair, tea set, breakfast table and portable writing desk, David Garrick's walking stick and a bookcase belonging to James Boswell.

The Museum holds a significant manuscript collection including signature letters from Johnson and his family and other important figures such as Boswell, Anna Seward, Hester Piozzi, Joshua Reynolds and Sarah Siddons.





“Quotes”

<https://www.britannica.com/quotes/Samuel-Johnson>

- Adversity

If a man talks of his misfortunes there is something in them that is not disagreeable to him; for where there is nothing but pure misery there never is any recourse to the mention of it.

- Conversation

The happiest conversation is that of which nothing is distinctly remembered, but a general effect of pleasing impression.

- Cowardice

It is thus that mutual cowardice keeps us in peace. Were one half of mankind brave, and one-half cowards, the brave would be always beating the cowards. Were all brave, they would lead a very uneasy life; all would be continually fighting: but being all cowards, we go on very well.

- Craftiness

Every man wishes to be wise, and they who cannot be wise are almost always cunning.

- Criticism and Critics

You may abuse a tragedy, though you cannot write one. You may scold a carpenter who has made you a bad table, though you cannot make a table. It is not your trade to make tables.

- Cruelty

Scarcely anything awakens attention like a tale of cruelty. The writer of news never fails . . . to tell how the enemies murdered children and

ravished virgins; and, if the scene of action be somewhat distant, scalps half the inhabitants of a province.

- Curiosity

Curiosity is, in great and generous minds, the first passion and the last.

- Death

Depend upon it, Sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.

- Drinking

Claret is the liquor for boys; port for men; but he who aspires to be a hero must drink brandy.

- Equality

Your levellers wish to level down as far as themselves; but they cannot bear levelling up to themselves.

- Food and Eating

A cucumber should be well sliced, and dressed with pepper and vinegar, and then thrown out, as good for nothing.

- Food and Eating

Some people have a foolish way of not minding, or pretending not to mind, what they eat. For my part, I mind my belly very studiously, and very carefully; for I look upon it, that he who does not mind his belly will hardly mind anything else.

- Gratitude

There are minds so impatient of inferiority that their gratitude is a species of revenge, and they return benefits, not because recompense is a pleasure, but because obligation is a pain.

- Hope

Hope is itself a species of happiness, and, perhaps, the chief happiness which this world affords.

- Hope

The natural flights of the human mind are not from pleasure to pleasure, but from hope to hope.

- Idleness and Laziness

If you are idle, be not solitary; if you are solitary, be not idle.

- Idleness and Laziness

Every man is, or hopes to be, an idler.

- Imagination

Were it not for imagination, Sir, a man would be as happy in the arms of a chambermaid as of a Duchess.

- Imitation

No man ever yet became great by imitation.

- Ireland and the Irish

The Irish are a *fair people*;—they never speak well of one another.

- Jealousy and Envy

Whoever envies another confesses his superiority.

- Knowledge and Learning

All knowledge is of itself of some value. There is nothing so minute or inconsiderable that I would not rather know it than not.

- Language

Language is the dress of thought.

- Marriage

Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures.

- Marriage

A gentleman who had been very unhappy in marriage, married immediately after his wife died: Johnson said, it was the triumph of hope over experience.

- Military

Every man thinks meanly of himself for not having been a soldier.

- Money

There are few ways in which a man can be more innocently employed than in getting money.

- Pain and Suffering

Those who do not feel pain seldom think that it is felt.

- Patriotism and Nationalism

Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel.

- Peoples and Places

When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford.

- Pleasure and Indulgence

No man is a hypocrite in his pleasures.

- Pleasure and Indulgence

Nothing is more hopeless than a scheme of merriment.

- Poverty

All the arguments which are brought to represent poverty as no evil, show it to be evidently a great evil. You never find people laboring to convince you that you may live very happily upon a plentiful fortune.

- Poverty

A decent provision for the poor, is the true test of civilization.

- Questions

Questioning is not the mode of conversation among gentlemen.

- Self-Condemnation

All censure of a man's self is oblique praise. It is in order to show how much he can spare. It has all the invidiousness of self-praise, and all the reproach of falsehood.

- Ships and Sailing

No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into a jail; for being in a ship is being in a jail, with the chance of being drowned.

- Style

An old tutor of a college said to one of his pupils: "Read over your compositions, and wherever you meet with a passage which you think is particularly fine, strike it out."

- The Present

No mind is much employed upon the present: recollection and anticipation fill up almost all our moments.

- The Will

All theory is against the freedom of the will; all experience for it.

- Travel

A man who has not been in Italy is always conscious of an inferiority.

- Trust

It is better to suffer wrong than to do it, and happier to be sometimes cheated than not to trust.

- Wealth

It is better to live rich than to die rich.

- Writing and Writers

No man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money.

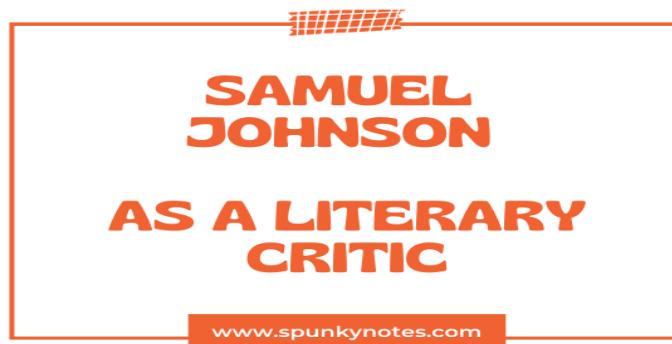
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Introduction

Old classics inspired many writers during the Neoclassical period in English literature. Among them, John Dryden, [Alexander Pope](#), and Samuel Johnson were some of the most notable critics.

John Dryden and Alexander Pope set the basic rules for Neoclassical criticism. They focused on rules, order, and the imitation of classical models. In contrast, Samuel Johnson had a different way of looking at things. He brought a new and unique approach to literary criticism.

Samuel Johnson brought a distinct approach. As a pivotal figure in the 18th century, Johnson's critiques were not just rooted in Neoclassical principles but also encompassed a broader moral and humanistic perspective.

Unlike Dryden, who was keen on establishing literary standards, and Pope, who often weaved criticism into his poetic satires, Johnson combined rigorous analysis with a profound understanding of human nature and morality.

Significant Contributions to Literary Criticism

Samuel Johnson, a renowned figure in English literature, made profound contributions to literary criticism. Here are some of his key contributions:

1. Preface to Shakespeare
2. The Rambler
3. The Lives of the Poets
4. A Dictionary of the English Language

1- Preface to Shakespeare

One of Johnson's seminal works in literary criticism is his "Preface to Shakespeare," published in 1765. Samuel Johnson wrote the "Preface to Shakespeare," partly to counter Voltaire's criticisms of Shakespeare.

While Voltaire, a French critic, criticized Shakespeare for his lack of adherence to classical norms, Johnson defended Shakespeare's genius and portrayal of human nature.

In this comprehensive critique, Johnson extols Shakespeare for his unparalleled ability to depict human nature in all its multifaceted complexity.

While he admires Shakespeare's genius, Johnson does not hesitate to point out areas where the Bard diverged from the classical unities, a framework held in high regard during Johnson's time.

2- The Rambler

Beyond his critique of Shakespeare, Johnson's essays in "The Rambler," further solidify his stature as a literary critic. The Rambler is a set of essays by Samuel Johnson from the 18th century. It is not just a book, but a periodical.

A periodical is a publication that comes out regularly, like a magazine or newspaper. Instead of being released immediately, periodicals are published at fixed intervals, whether daily, weekly, monthly, or even yearly.

"The Rambler" was a series of essays written in London between 1750 and 1752. It was published by John Payne and cost two pence. Readers would get a new essay

twice a week. Out of the 208 essays, Samuel Johnson wrote almost all of them, missing only four.

There are a few reasons why "The Rambler" stands out. Johnson writes in a clear, direct style, making his ideas easy to grasp. The subjects he chose are timeless, making them relevant even today.

3- The Lives of the Poets

The Lives of the Poets is a work by Samuel Johnson. It is a collection in which he wrote about the lives and works of several English poets. He did not just write about their lives, but he also gave his opinions on their poetry. It makes the book both a biography and a review of literary works.

Johnson chose poets from different times. Some were from the past, and some were his contemporaries, meaning they lived during his time. By doing this, he gave readers a broad view of English poetry's history.

The book is not just a list of facts. Johnson shared stories about the poets' lives, challenges, successes, and failures. Johnson's comments were sharp and insightful. He praised the poets when he felt they did well and also pointed out where they could have done better.

Another interesting thing about "The Lives of the Poets" is that Johnson included his personal opinions. So, readers do not just learn about the poets, but they also get to know Johnson's thoughts and feelings.

4- A Dictionary of the English Language

Johnson's "A Dictionary of the English Language" is another monumental work that cements his reputation as a critic and scholar rather than a poet. This dictionary was not just a compilation of words but also offered critiques and insights into word usage. It further emphasizes Johnson's role as a critic and thinker.

Distinctive Features of Johnson's Criticism

1. Moral Focus

Samuel Johnson believed that literature should teach good values. He thought that writers should guide readers to make better choices in life. When Johnson reviewed a book or a poem, he often looked for its moral message.

If a work does not have a clear moral lesson, he might not view it favorably. For Johnson, a story was not just for entertainment. It should also help readers become better people.

For example, when he discussed Shakespeare, he appreciated how the playwright showed the consequences of ambition in "Macbeth" and the dangers of jealousy in "Othello." Johnson felt these plays served as moral warnings about unchecked desires and distrust.

2. Realism in Literature

Johnson liked stories that showed real life. He did not prefer tales that were too far from reality. For him, the best literature showed human nature as it truly is. He valued characters and plots that readers could relate to.

When a writer showed both life's good and bad sides, Johnson appreciated it. He believed that showing real emotions and challenges made a story powerful.

He praised Shakespeare for capturing the essence of humanity in characters like Hamlet, who struggles with indecision, and King Lear, who faces the harsh realities of aging and betrayal.

3. Emphasis on Reader's Feelings

Samuel Johnson said that a story's actual value was in how it affected the reader's emotions. He believed a reader's emotional response was vital to a story's impact. He believed a good book or poem should touch the reader's heart.

It should make them feel something strong. Johnson saw it as successful if the work could bring readers joy, sadness, or deep thought. For him, the connection between the writer and the reader is vital.

4. Respect for Tradition

Johnson had great respect for old and classic works. He believed that there were certain rules in literature that writers should follow. These rules came from the works of ancient writers and poets.

Johnson felt that these classics set the standard for good writing. While he was open to new ideas, he always compared them to the standards set by the classics.

Johnson's reverence for classical literature is seen in his frequent references to ancient writers like Homer and Virgil. For instance, when discussing the epic form, he often compared contemporary works to the standards set by "The Iliad" and "The Aeneid," emphasizing the timeless value of these ancient epics.

5. Openness to Innovation

Even though Johnson loved classic works, he was open to new ideas. He believed writers should always try to improve and develop fresh stories.

However, he also felt that new ideas should have a base in tradition. For Johnson, the key was to balance the old and the new. He appreciated innovation but wanted it to respect the values of classic literature.

For example, he praised Milton's "Paradise Lost" for its inventive approach to the biblical story of Adam and Eve. Though the story deviated from classical epics in many ways, Johnson acknowledged Milton's genius in crafting a new kind of epic that was both innovative and deeply rooted in tradition.

Dr. Johnson: More a Critic than a Poet

While recognized for various literary contributions, Samuel Johnson is often remembered more for his critical analyses than his poetic endeavors.

His critical writings' depth, consistency, and influence overshadow his poetic works in many ways. Here is a breakdown explaining why Johnson is considered more a critic than a poet:

1. Volume and Impact of Critical Works

Johnson's critical writings, particularly his essays and reviews, are vast. His "Preface to Shakespeare" and "The Lives of the Poets" are seminal works in literary criticism.

These writings not only evaluated the works of other authors but also set benchmarks for literary evaluations. The influence and reach of these critical writings have endured, making them foundational texts for literature students even today.

2. Poetry: Not His Primary Legacy

While Johnson did write poems, such as "The Vanity of Human Wishes" and "London," they did not have the same widespread impact as his critical works.

Although these poems are respected and studied, they do not define Johnson's literary legacy to the same extent as his critiques.

3. Depth of Literary Analysis

Johnson's critiques are celebrated for their depth and insight. He could dissect literary works, extracting their essence and evaluating them against classical standards and moral implications. This depth is evident across his critical writings, making them a treasure trove for literary scholars.

4. Personal Affinity

Johnson himself had a keen affinity for critiquing. He was known for his wit, sharp observations, and ability to engage in profound literary discussions. His inclinations, combined with his academic pursuits, made him naturally gravitate towards criticism.

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Samuel Johnson's 'Preface to Shakespeare': An Analysis

<https://brandantes.medium.com/samuel-johnsons-preface-to-shakespeare-an-analysis-9d101770577f>

By



Brandon Dantes

It must be kept in mind that Samuel Johnson's essay titled 'Preface to Shakespeare' was published in the late 18th century, only one and a half centuries after Shakespeare. At the time there was no proper critical work on the man. Therefore, Johnson was one of the first to have published an all-encompassing collection of Shakespeare's works. It would be inaccurate to refer to 'Preface to Shakespeare' as an essay, rather it is a work of "conjectural criticism" as Johnson calls it. 'Preface to Shakespeare' can be divided into 2 parts: the man himself and the art of literary criticism.

At the beginning Johnson uses the metaphor of the numerous mountain ranges and rivers to refer to the magnanimity and the profundity of various writers. He says that it would be incorrect to praise the ancients at the expense of the modern writers for not all modern writers are unworthy. Thus, there are many lofty mountains and deep rivers that we do not know of. Classical writers like Homer are universal and we can find an equivalent in William Shakespeare (1564-1616). Johnson considers Shakespeare's merits and flaws within the domains of theatre. English theatre in the late 16th century was in its nascent stage as the people had no exact knowledge about stagecraft or the classical rules for that matter, and this explains why Shakespeare was able to experiment according to his "nature". He has been criticized for not following the three unities but this is actually a merit according to Johnson, because practically speaking, the unities of time and place are flawed notions. These two unities are interlinked because if in the course of the action a character were to be portrayed in two different geographical locations then a significant amount of time should have passed for the character to have travelled the distance. Therefore, since drama is performed on stage for an hour or so it is impossible to maintain the unities of time and place because it is absurd. Johnson says that theatrical performances are not to be mistaken for reality, because in reality, life never plays out in the span of one day. Moreover, it is the imagination which gives more scope to the audience as the mind can perceive the stage as two different places. Thus, the idea of theatre keeping in tune with reality is absurd and Shakespeare is to be commended for not following these ancient rules. Another merit would be that he follows the unity of action, that is to say that the plot in his plays are coherent and the events are sequentially connected so as to not take the audience on a totally different track of action. He might have sub plots in his plays but they tend to interconnect with the main plot thus ensuring a variety of themes and at the same time coherence of action. Johnson has criticized Shakespeare for writing without instructing morally, but Shakespeare's aim was to cater not just to the upper classes, but also to the groundlings. This explains why his plays were popular amongst

different kinds of people. We can find aristocrats and commoners in his plays and each of these characters play an important role, not to forget, the clowns who wear "motley" which is symbolic of an ass or a donkey.



20th Century Depiction of a Jester.

These clowns can be gross at times with their jests but they tend to deliver hard hitting lines about life which can even take an upper-class audience by surprise. After all, how can a fool be so full of depth? We must not forget that Johnson criticizes this lack of morality because he wrote this essay in the Augustan era (18th century) which was highly moral, but Shakespeare was writing in the 16th century when English Theatre had not yet developed and England was just starting to rise in the literary world. Shakespeare definitely does not endorse immorality, in fact he was a commercial writer, and catering to the upper and lower classes earned him success. Shakespeare never craved future recognition and fame and this is proven by the fact that he never published a collection of his works as he was intent on present success. Johnson goes on to say that Comedy came naturally to Shakespeare and that Tragedy seemed strained. It is true that the comic wit of Shakespeare is unparalleled. The ricochet of wit is quick and sudden and can be usually seen between two lovers or the clown and other characters in the play. Speaking of characters, Johnson rightly points out that Shakespeare holds a "true mirror" to life as seen in the universality of his characters. Voltaire criticizes his characters for being inconsistent but we all know that human beings can never be consistent, because Johnson points out that even kings love wine although it may be considered too base for a regal figure. This is where Shakespeare's greatest charm lies, because he reveals man in all his shades: his kings celebrate victories with wine; princes can usurp the throne by sinfully killing the king; the clown can be profound; the lover becomes poetic when thinking of his lady love; Some people can be purely evil for no reason whatsoever (Don John and Iago); even the lady can be wittier than her lover; or a lady can be mentally stronger than her lord; and so on. Shakespeare's insight can be seen in his ability to reveal the

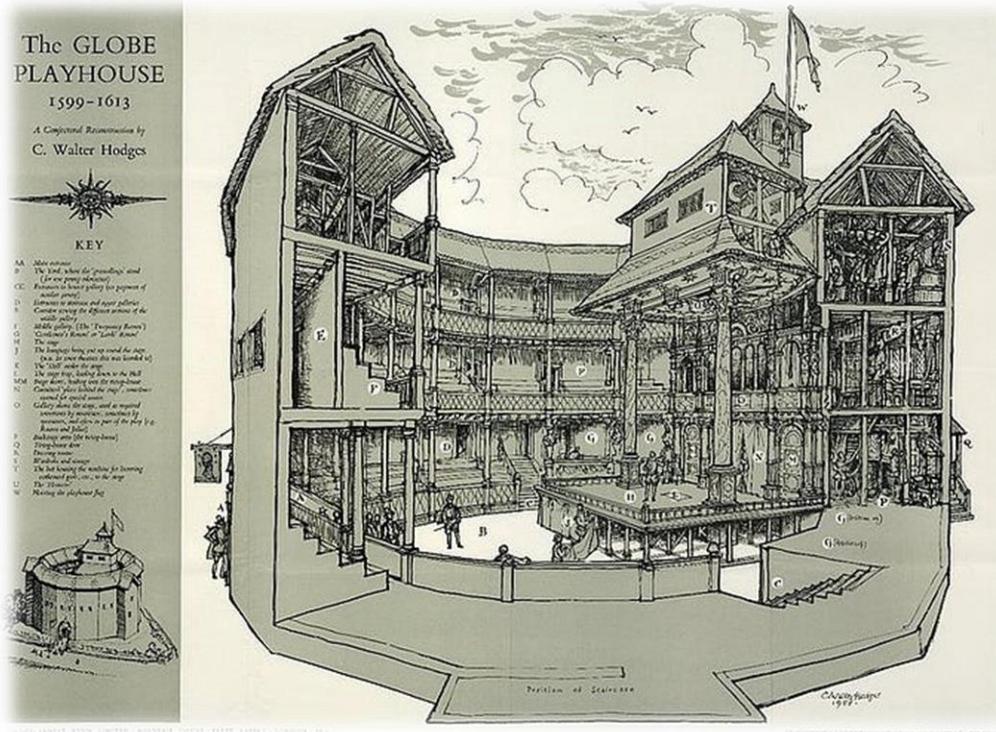
innermost workings of the mind as seen in the case of Othello and his insecurities. However, when it comes to Tragedy, Johnson says that Shakespeare is not skilful enough because he seems to suddenly unknot his Tragedies with total destruction. This is true as we have seen in the endings of **Hamlet** and **Macbeth** but we cannot deny the fact that these plays have their own sense of profundity which we can all resonate with.



'Hamlet, Horatio, and the Gravediggers' by Eugène Delacroix.

We all know about the gravedigger scene in **Hamlet** (Act 5 Scene 1) which speaks of the insignificance of man in the face of time. Johnson also criticizes Shakespeare for his incessant use of puns which can sometimes be insipid and dull. Sometimes it doesn't even make sense, but when it does, it can be pleasing to the groundlings because quite often the puns can be gross, but at the same time there are also witty puns which can please the upper classes or perhaps the lower classes as well. Thus, he caters to both classes in society, and the audience must understand that one man's disgust is another man's entertainment. It must be noted that some of Shakespeare's plays were a mixture of Tragedy and Comedy as seen in the introduction of comic relief scenes in Tragedies such as The Porter Scene in **Macbeth** (Act 2 Scene 3), and some tragic scenes in Comedies as can be seen in the ending of **Twelfth Night** where Malvolio becomes an isolated character. This keeps in tune with realism, if any drama ought to portray reality, because Johnson says that life is never on one

track since every human being experiences the binaries of life such as happiness and sorrow, and hope and despair. Shakespeare has also been criticized by Dennis and Rhymer for being anachronistic as his Romans are not so Roman, but Johnson says that Shakespeare might have presented the ancient races as people with English attitudes and culture, but most importantly he focuses on the inherent human nature present in all of us and that is why Shakespeare never really concerned himself with the external aspects that might differentiate one culture from another. Whatever be the merits and faults of Shakespeare, he has proven himself in appealing to the universal nature of man, and it is this that makes him the Father of the English Stage. It is important to note that he also gave shape to the English Theatre when it was in an undeveloped state.



Conjectural reconstruction of the Globe theatre by C. Walter Hodges based on archaeological and documentary evidence.

The metaphor about the rare rock and the sand can ideally sum up Johnson's criticism on Shakespeare. In this metaphor Johnson refers to Shakespeare as the rock/diamond which stands in its place over time and the sand as the other poets or writers who keep getting washed away with each passing year only to give way to fresh sand that is brought on to the shore by the sea that represents time. Thus, this metaphor establishes the universal appeal of Shakespeare's plays which is precisely the reason why people connect with his plays even today, "today" for Johnson being the 18th century, and we can safely confirm that Shakespeare's importance has still not diminished in the 21st century.

Finally, about the art of criticism, Johnson says that critics tend to better one another by defaming one another with incessant expletives. Similar to the rock and sand metaphor, here Johnson implies that there is no point in such proclamations of pride on the part of conjectural critics because with time society changes and people change. What was once a victorious achievement for the critic might amount to nothing but ashes in the future. Therefore, Johnson claims a stance of neutral objectivity when analyzing the works of Shakespeare. Johnson has given credit to critics from whom he has borrowed; has tried to maintain the originality of the texts as far as possible, thus saving it from the unholy intrusions of some other critics; and he has also abstained from belittling his fellow critics. He uses the metaphor of Roman Honour to describe the aim of literary criticism as it involves defending the citizen (conjecture) rather than killing the enemy (fellow critics). Johnson's neutral objective stance is one in which he has his guard up through all the centuries, because at the end he states that there are portions which he has elaborated on and there are portions which he may have missed out, but he hopes that the readers would not accuse him of anything since these are his views. He also states that he recognizes the very nature of a critic's job which is subject to being outdated at any given moment, and so he has signed up for this work in a healthy manner where he has maintained a neutral stance unlike some critics who seem more bent on killing the enemy than defending the citizen. To conclude, I will say that Johnson aptly states that if a critic requires many words to prove his fellow critic wrong then perhaps that fellow critic is right, and that if a critic needs many words to prove himself right then perhaps, he is wrong. Johnson's neutrally objective stance accounts for why his essay 'Preface to Shakespeare' is still widely acknowledged as a canonical piece of work when it comes to learning William Shakespeare. Johnson may have some of his own personal views, but the difference is that he never imposes these views on his readers with the confidence of a braggart who breaks his sword upon a stone only to show how bravely he fought.

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Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Johnson%27s_literary_criticism

Poetry

Johnson's literature, especially his *Lives of the Poets* series, is marked by various opinions on what would make a poetic work excellent. He believed that the best poetry relied on contemporary language, and he disliked the use of decorative or purposefully archaic language. In particular, he was suspicious of [John Milton](#)'s language, whose blank verse would mislead later poets, and could not stand the poetic language of [Thomas Gray](#). On Gray, Johnson wrote, "Gray thought his language more poetical as it was more remote from common use". Johnson would sometimes write parodies of poetry that he felt was

poorly done; one such example is his translation of [Euripides](#)'s play, *Medea* in a parody of one poet's style alongside of his version of how the play should be translated. His greatest complaint was the overuse of obscure allusion found in works like Milton's *Lycidas*, and he preferred poetry that could be easily read. In addition to his views on language, Johnson believed that a good poem would incorporate new and unique imagery.

In his shorter works, Johnson preferred shorter lines and to fill his work with a feeling of empathy, which possibly influenced [Alfred Edward Housman](#)'s poetry. In *London*, his first imitation of [Juvenal](#), Johnson uses the form to express his political opinion. It is a poem of his youth and deals with the topic in a playful and almost joyous manner. As [Donald Greene](#) claims, "its charm comes from youthful exuberance an

Biography

In terms of biography, Johnson did not agree with [Plutarch](#)'s model of using biographies to teach morals and complement the subjects. Instead, Johnson believed in portraying the subjects accurately, including any negative aspects of an individual's life. Although revolutionary and more accurate as a biographer, Johnson had to struggle with his beliefs against a society that was unwilling to hear of details that may be viewed as tarnishing a reputation. In *Rambler* 60, Johnson put forth why he thought society could not be comfortable with hearing the negative truth of individuals that they admire:

All joy or sorrow for the happiness or calamities of others is produced by an act of imagination that realizes the event, however fictitious, or approximates it, however remote, by placing us, for a time, in the condition of him whose fortune we contemplate, so that we feel, while the deception lasts, whatever motions would be excited by the same good or evil happening to ourselves... Our passions are therefore more strongly moved, in proportion as we can more readily adopt the pains or pleasure proposed to our minds, by recognizing them as once our own.

Also, Johnson did not feel that biography should be limited to the most important people, but felt that the lives of lesser individuals could be deemed the most significant. In his *Lives of the Poets*, he chose great and lesser poets, and throughout all of his biographies, he always insisted on including what others may consider as trivial details to fully describe the lives of his subjects. When it came to autobiography, and diaries including his own, Johnson considered that genre of work as one having the most significance; he explains this in *Idler* 84, when he described how a writer of an autobiography would be the least likely to distort their own life.

Lexicography

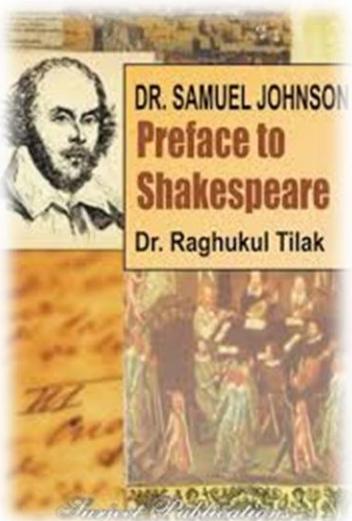
Johnson's thoughts on biography and on poetry found their union in his understanding of what would make a good critic. His works were dominated with his intent to use them for literary criticism, including his *Dictionary* to which he wrote: "I lately published a Dictionary like those compiled by the academies of Italy and France, *for the use of such as aspire to exactness of criticism, or elegance of style*". Although the smaller dictionary was written for the masses and became the common household dictionary, Johnson's original dictionary was an academic tool that examined how words were used, especially those uses that were found in literary works. To achieve this purpose, Johnson included quotations from Bacon, Hooker, Milton, Shakespeare, Spenser, and many others from the literary fields that Johnson thought were most important: natural science, philosophy, poetry, and theology. These quotes and usages were all compared and carefully studied, so that others could understand what words meant in literature.

THE
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 IN TEN VOLUMES.
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 AND
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Printed for C. Dilly, J. Dodsley, W. Strahan, & Co., and P. Elmslie, by G. and J. Robinson, at the Swan, Strand, Charing-Cross, and Castle, R. Herring, W. Johnson, W. Dyer, T. Cadell, E. Jenkins, S. Coxwell, S. Watts, T. Longman, B. Law, E. and C. Dilly, C. Dilly, W. Dyer, T. Cadell, E. Jenkins, S. Coxwell, O. Kelly, T. Longman, T. Davies, J. Edwards, T. Evans, F. Newbery, G. Robinson, T. Park, J. Williams, M. Hocquelet, and J. Roberts.
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Plays of William Shakespeare (1773 expanded edition) title page

Johnson felt that words, in and of themselves, were meaningless, but that meaning comes from context. The only way to understand the word is to examine its usage, and a critic must understand lexicography before they can understand what people are saying.^[13] Later critics would attempt to create theories to analyse the aesthetics of literature, but Johnson was not a theorist and he used his ideas only for the practical purpose to better read the works. When it came to Shakespeare's plays, Johnson emphasised the role of a reader in understanding language when he wrote, "If Shakespeare has difficulties above other writers, it is to be imputed to the nature of his work, which required the use of common colloquial language, and consequently admitted many phrases allusive, elliptical, and proverbial, such as we speak and hear every hour without observing them".

Shakespeare



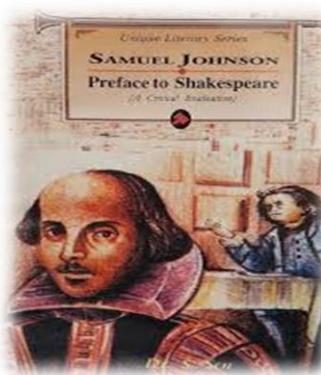
His works on Shakespeare were not devoted just to Shakespeare, but to critical theory as a whole, and, in his *Preface* to Shakespeare, Johnson rejects the previous belief of the [classical unities](#) and establishes a more natural theory on what makes drama work: drama should be faithful to life. In particular, Johnson claimed that "Among [Shakespeare's] other excellencies it ought to be remarked, because it has hitherto been unnoticed, that his *heroes are men*, that the love and hatred, the hopes and fears, of his chief personages are such as common to other human beings... Shakespeare's excellence is not the fiction of a tale, but the representation of life: and his reputation is therefore safe, till human nature shall be changed." Besides defending Shakespeare, Johnson was willing to discuss Shakespeare's faults, especially his lacking of morality, his vulgarity, and

carelessness in crafting plots.

Besides direct literary criticism, Johnson emphasised the need to establish a text that accurately reflects what an author wrote. In his *Preface*, Johnson analysed the various versions of Shakespeare's plays and argued how an editor should work on them. Shakespeare's plays, in particular, had multiple editions that each contained errors from the printing process. This problem was compounded by careless editors deeming difficult words as incorrect and changing them in later editions. Johnson believed that an editor should not alter the text in such a way, and, when creating his own edition of

Shakespeare's plays, he relied on the thousands of quotations and notes that he used in crafting his *Dictionary* to restore, to the best of his knowledge, the original text.

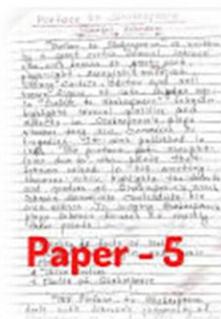
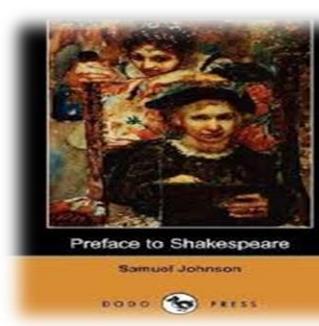
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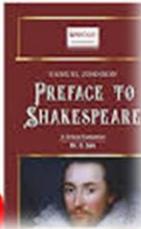
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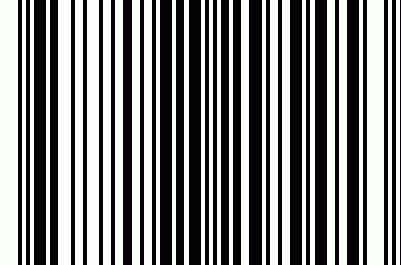
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